Graveyard Digger, What Company Do You Keep?

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by SeraphitefromSeattle

Summary

Both were quiet as they stared, though it was Hannibal who was the first to break if only to speak. “Could I interest you in dinner?”

A laugh escaped his lips, dry and almost humourless as tension eased from his muscles. “Trying to woo me, Doctor?” The question was only half-rhetorical, a spreading sense of something he couldn't place pooling at the back of his throat. He tried not to tease that it wasn't even close to lunch.

“Quite.”

-

An AU where Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter are both serial killers, and court each other in death.

Notes

I need a very specific Hannigram where they don't kiss or say ily but show love in the ways they can bc they’re stupid and queer like killing. This isn't that but they’re courting ig

Bury Me (So I Can Sleep)

August was his least favourite time of the year.

The air was thick and wet with condensation, humid Virginia atmosphere pressing against his skin like the flies that festered on the dirt beside them. It had been warm when they'd left, AC whirring angrily on the drive (thank god for FBI-paid vehicles) and though Will had been certain it was soon to die, it had held up.

A good thing, he'd reasoned and immediately regretted letting Jack push him onto this case the moment he'd stepped from the car.

This area was lush with greenery, with trees standing tall like ancient soldiers without respite. If the air hadn't smelt of death and rot, Will could've enjoyed the brief shade each gave; though the area they were viewing was in the sunlight.

His shirt stuck to his back as Will waded through the overgrowth, desperate to ignore the attack on his senses as Beverly pushed past him. She murmured something to the effect of *keep up, Graham;* though the words were lost on him as he wavered around the edge of the tree line.

The casefile Zeller had passed to him minutes before was warm, held in palms slick with sweat and he couldn't decide what excuse he'd like to use to keep his distance from the area that smelled of *rot* and *death* and *peat*. In the end, he settled against the trunk of a particularly itchy red oak, bark pressing against his skin like the spine of some elder thing as he flipped the file open.

A man, hair greying and age betraying him as his skin sagged in a photo all too high-quality glared up at him from the page. His surroundings were dark, a camera flash finding roots that swam like worms about the grave he'd been laid in.

They hadn't the chance to run dental work or fingerprints yet, body freshly discovered though the death was anything but recent. Dead for an age, yet no name. *Tragic,* his mind whispered, and Will blinked angrily.

Jack had rushed to his office the hour before, barking at his students that *class was dismissed* before thrusting Will into a far-too-clean SUV. The drive had been spent in semi-silence, and what little conversation had been made was more Jack rambling angrily about *murderers* and *idiocy* as if such didn't pay his bills.

In honesty, Will couldn't care, and yet the weight of August's heat on his skin and the low

buzzing drone of insects around them made the muscles in his arms tighten. A camera flashed to his right and he stepped aside, eyes glazing over as he ran down the file. *..ound by local kids, Jacob Sw.. ..hiking..*

Irritation dug at his skin as Price passed by again, banter lazy and quiet against the press of flies on their backs. The file in his hands felt too light, and Will shook the urge to snap as Jack tore it from him. The man barked something, only half audible behind the growing thrum that ate at his ears and yet he did not need to hear it.

He knew it was about the murder.

Beverly was the first to draw back, dragging Zeller with as Price snapped one last too-bright photo. Hazmats shuffled almost hesitantly from the scene, little yellow tags left in their places as he glared. He could remove the rest.

Gingerly, he drew forward, fighting the urge to bite a sneer at those who hadn't moved. They weren't far enough from the pit, not far enough from the flies and disease and *rot*. (Not enough for comfort. To ensure those who did not know him wouldn't whisper, wouldn't wonder *why.)*

The grave was a wide thing, soil thick and crumbling beneath his hands as he crouched. It was warm as his hands pressed to the ground, dirt melding around his fingers in a pleading comfort. Weeds ate at the rubble, the headstones surrounding it almost illegible and yet he knew it couldn't be who lay three feet below.

Casting a look back, he fidgeted for a moment before sighing. And slowly, he let the pendulum swing.

There was a certain dance to suffocation, hands wrapped so tenderly around various pressure points as you squeeze. This had been quick, angry and methodical; a tango in the woods as one chased the other. The place was a graveyard, old and forgotten with time as fields sprouted around it. Trees caged it, protective of their hoard and yet not enough to save it.

The man had been easy to catch, flailing and scattering dirt but he was faster. A grave was dug, fresh and unwilling to disturb the one beneath it, and yet it did not matter. Few weeds grew about then, thick and vining as he worked.

A sewing needle, stitching wounds together that had no place until his prey was left with his arms crossed at the bottom; legs bound together in eternity. His eyes were last, maybe; held closed by strange sutures to keep the dark's pretty touch.

There were bells around them, the graveyard they kept old enough to yearn the noise of life. This man's, though, was held in the palms of his hands. *Do not disturb my rest.*

A good night's sleep, held in the safety of nightingale's song. The Earth cradles you as blood could seep; and might not that you find it long.

Return, oh lover of the buried.

"It's uhm," He coughed, bile choking his lips as he turned from the grave. Will's eyes burned, the whisper of death pressing to his skull and all too much. Jack stood to the side, insects buzzing about him as he swatted at a particularly bulbous fly.

"A bed. He's taunting him, like this is what he asked for." His brow creased against the heat, and Will tried not to vomit from the smell. "Did our victim take sleeping pills? Any sort of melatonin, history with insomnia.." A nervousness cupped his breath and he trailed off as Jack's frown deepened.

"We don't *know* ," Crawford hissed, and a headache blossomed against his skull. "Not yet. Did he think he was *helping* him or.." He waved his hand, patronising tone making Will grit his teeth. *Always to the next thing.* "No." The words spat and Will found himself surprised at the anger in it. "This- this was burial rights. Were his organs removed? Maybe embalmed? This was a while ago, but-"

Will swallowed and tried to shrug the attention from the people around him. He could feel the pulsing glare of the group, only intensified with unfamiliarity. It was already too much

Predictably, his hands found their way to the hem of his shirt, tugging at the broken seams and twisting them about in nervous energy. *What little would help* . "It's possible," Zeller piped up, and Crawford's glare shifted. *Saved* . "We'd need to head back to the lab.."

The sound of conversation faded to the whirr of cicadas as Will slunk away, covering the smallest laugh with a quiet cough as Price slapped his companion for daring to use the word *lab* . Perhaps, if he was quick enough, he could leave without having to beg Jack. Cite it as a fever, or that he'd *thought* he'd got the go-ahead.

The lot was full, though empty of his car and a sigh pressed his lips when he remembered. He'd been driven here, and if Will wanted a ride home he'd need to wait on Jack's time.

Oh well. Might as well mooch on the air conditioning.

A figure stood off to the side, familiar silhouette covered in the shade of the decidedly *expensive* car he stood against. Hannibal Lecter greeted him with a nod, an expression on his lips that he couldn't place. "Will," His voice was warm, and the psychologist shifted to make room as Will slotted next to him. "Doctor Lecter,"

"Hannibal, please." The response was quick, and Will blinked as the doctor retorted.

Passively, he dipped his head in a nod, and they were quiet for a moment before Hannibal began. "Leaving so soon? I thought this was quite the case," Will paused, snuffing out a laugh as it pressed to his throat.

"Sure," He nodded, eyes closing as shade pressed at his skull. It was cool, and if he could just ignore the thrumming of a headache behind his eyes, Will just might've found it relaxing. "If you prefer the heat of a grave. *Funeral rights* ," A scoff, and Hannibal shifted.

"Quite."

Another beat of silence before there was a scuffing of expensive shoes against gravel, and the doctor moved away. "By chance," A hum from beside him, keys rattling in a lock.

"Are you looking for a way home?" Will bristled, blinking as he heard the opening of the passenger-side door. "I couldn't," Lecter shook his head, cutting the words from his throat as a hand that ghosted across his shoulder pressed him to the inside of the door. *He sure did like his personal space.*

The inside was nice, suave as it smelt like lavender. Luxurious and clean. Not at all like him. *Sweat-slicked and dirt-covered. Grimy, with unwashed hair and yellowing teeth and a body that smelled of death.*

"I insist."

A sigh, and he pressed a hand to Hannibal’s in defeat, letting the warmth linger on his skin as he pushed him away. He couldn't stand to argue.

“If you insist.”

Devotion

Chapter Summary

The threads come unravelled, and Hannibal questions why this newest killer would hang a body for the Ripper of all.

Chapter Notes

They’re so stupid I love them

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Will.” There is a certain illusion to death. Held in the palms of ones hands, a life will always be yours to take. It is as simple as a drop of strychnine, one milligram all that he needed.

“ *Will.* ” Jack’s tone dipped, irritation building as a hand pressed to Will’s shoulder. Another shufflof gravel and dirt, and Crawford was beside him; muddied-brown eyes glaring like it was *Will* who killed the woman before them.

It was, but Jack didn’t need to know that.

“I need to know,” *Ironic.* The atmosphere writhed with the thickening tang of iron and pineapple weed, luke-warm gore an almost comforting scent in its own right. “Is it the Ripper?” Another pause and Will shook his head, the inhale on his lips sharp and irritated. “ *No* ,”

His expression twisted, eyes narrowing as he gestured forward. “This is competition.”

A sigh from his right, and Will resisted the urge to roll his eyes as Jack muttered more queries. “Great. A pissing contest.” With how much Crawford spit the question, you’d think he’d never worked another case in his life. “ *Why* .”

The skin of his forearm itched, phantom memory slicking his fingers like the night before; up to his arms in gore as he spent hours tearing to find beauty. “This- this *killer,* ” Annoying, the word; caught between his teeth.

“He wants our eyes on *him* ,” At a point, could Jack tell? Did he know that his voice shook only with excitement?- of treading the line between safety and suspicion? “Wants the Ripper to revere him just as much.”

It was true, really.

Will wasn't a liar. He performed, muttered cries of fortes to Jack and let him come to a different conclusion but even then Will Graham was anything but a liar.

There was a thrill within dancing between fantasy and reality, even when he’d found the blade of a carving knife stuck between his victim’s shoulder blades.

She knew she was dead the moment her body locked, crumpling like wet tissue as nerve endings snapped and sinew broke. The wound hadn't torn all of her mobility, though, and he’d shushed her through the gurgled cries on her lips.

Oh; a gentle word, pressed to his maw as her skin stripped away to reveal muscle and the prettiest of cartilage. *Sh, shh.*

There was no real reason she hung from the branches of this boxelder. Nothing other than the fact that she’d drawn far too close, come within inches of the grave he’d so recently buried another and hadn't seen the knife when it’d came.

Dumb luck , Beverley had whispered when she’d pulled sample after diluted sample from his victim, though Will couldn't help but disagree.

She was *anything* but lucky to have been at the end of his knife, to have been stripped of her flesh and donned with a crown of thorns. Honestly, Will was anything but biblical in his work, and yet The Ripper had seemed interested with it years before.

Garret Jacob Hobbs tore, Abigail Hobbs sliced, Will Graham skinned and The Ripper, *well,* ripped. They were not all unalike, yet Will had only one gaze he hoped to catch.

God only knew if The Ripper would see.

Drip.

There was something wet on his cheek.

Phantom blood pooled at the back of his throat, drizzling from the body's maw from above and into his nose. Will *drowned* in it, a gasping inhale turned choking cough all the illusion needed to shatter. Jack Crawford had been talking, more *at* him than to him, but he hadn't heard.

The word *copycat* caught his attention, breaking the minute solace Will had gathered as Crawford ranted a little louder. "And this *copycat*- this- this *killer* just decided to *admire* him! To hell with Virginia,"

It itched at the back of his throat, irritation building at the very *inclination* that Will had simply killed to copy The Ripper. He couldn't, couldn't ever reach that potential in the holiness that the man held, but he could *try* .

He could strip this woman of her skin and replace it with the deadened bark of a tree, a noose of her own sinew wrapped around her throat and bound with cucumber vine.

She hung so *beautifully* from the boxelder, arms stretched around her head in a gruesome halo and feet crushed together with a stake. *Divine* , Will could've whispered, and as Zeller and another stepped around the fallen branches beneath her he couldn't help but glance over.

Doctor Hannibal Lecter had joined them on this run, the death in necessity of psychological evaluation. It was what Crawford had hired him for, perhaps, and yet the man had yet to say a

single word.

He’d stood beneath the corpse, hands clasped behind his back and darting auburn eyes glazed over in what could've been respect of sorts. To who, Will was quite unsure, but a feeling of pride welled in his stomach the longer he stared.

“It is biblical,” The words slipped from his psychiatrist's lips, quiet enough to go unnoticed yet Will heard. They were closer, two feet apart and yet so far apart. He wasn't sure who had been the one to move. “The recreation of Jesus in morbidity.”

The words were sly, a parasite that worked its way down his spine and sent a shrill shiver through his muscles. Will licked his lips, uncertain. It wasn't what he’d meant. “Not quite.” Hannibal stilled.

They were quiet, Crawford’s incessant chatter fading as the world stopped to listen. “An offering, perhaps?” Doctor Lecter’s voice was so soft, so *ridged* that it was reminiscent of rigour mortis. Will nodded. His companion tried further in his absence. “To who?”

It was less of a question and more of a prod. A thumb, pressed gently to a gaping wound as if to spir more bloodied ichor from unto it.

A laugh, burbling in his throat that he bit down into a humourless taunt. “The Ripper,” Will’s hands pressed to the edge of his hip, dipping into the pockets of his jeans in the futility of comfort. What kind of game was he playing? Lecter wasn’t stupid. Wasn’t Jack.

Hannibal’s head cocked, the vaguest pull of his neck all it took to make Will pull his gaze from the doctor and back to his work. Auburn, honey-sweet eyes fixed on the side of his skull, boring unfeeling holes into his head so harsh that it hurt.

“Why?”

The doctor never said much, did he? Never spoke more than five words, careful to pull answers with his eyes alone. He wished he knew what the man was thinking.

“A prayer.” An inhale, sweet on his tongue as Will evaded Lecter’s gaze. “To hope that he will see him.”

“Hm.” Hannibal nodded, head dipping as if he was the one who had killed the woman before them, as if he could unravel the secrets under Will Graham’s nailbed.

“Then let us hope he will.”

And that was all he needed to say.

Chapter End Notes

Comments about how I’ve written go to Will and feed his dogs :3 BROADEN THEIR PALLETE!!

Nested, Unbothered

Chapter Summary

A man is found hung on the side of the street, with all the tell-tale signs of the Ripper. Will Graham eats at Hannibal Lecter's table.

Chapter Notes

Note that they are queer

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing to come to mind upon entering the scene had been the word *sin,* eyes watering as sterilisation and gore permeated his senses.

Beverley had been the one to call this time, working for Jack in his absence to interrupt the time he'd alloted for a late dinner. Supper had been a combination of potatoes, bread rolls, and, as all of his latest meals were; *long pig.*

The taste had stuck with him on the drive, mood decidedly soured as the clock on his dash tipped into the morning hours. It was late, even for a crime scene, but this was just *bullshit* if Will had any say.

Price had looked just as thrilled by the time Will had waded his way through the police tape and late-night onlookers, gentle chatter from the edge of his radio enough to irritate. It wasn't his fault, really, but he was still just as annoyed.

"Will," Beverley Katz and Hannibal Lecter had met him by the fence, surprise flickering across his features as he glanced at the latter. "Happy to see you've joined us."

“Wouldn’t miss it.” A laugh slipped from between his lips, tongue pressed to the roof of his maw in a dry taunt. “Couldn’t let you and Zeller get in on all of the fun.” She snickered, the sound faint as he inhaled a little too shallow.

Beverley turned, quick to lead the way with a half-assed quip he couldn't quite hear and a smile; though Will wouldn't of noticed if she hadn't. He was too busy staring at Hannibal.

He hadn't known he’d be there.

The scene was gruesome, filled with the low buzzing drone of horseflies and the click of camera lenses capturing morbidity that rang in his ears like death’s toll.

Certainly, death had visited; the body that hung from the neck of a light pole swinging so gently in the breeze that Will wasn't quite sure that it wasn't a picture itself.

The man had been pretty once; long, flowing brown hair woven into a tight braid that swayed in tune with its owner. It seemed to mock him, perfectly fine as it hovered only inches from his death.

A trail of stab wounds found passage on his throat, slit end to end only to pursue further down. The corpse had been gutted, a surgical slit cutting at his stomach like the slowest of kisses and intestines hanging just as limp.

Bloodshot eyes told the story of a fearful end, dried tear streaks leaving pretty little pools for the flies that crowded his jaw to enjoy. His tongue, too, had been cut; sluggish and dry blood staining the man’s chin. Honey had been smeared across his face; thick and dry in the dim light Will could find it in.

He was dead. Gutted and torn; the life ripped from him for something that *screamed* courtship. This kill practically *sang,* voice so earnest and godlike that Will didn't even have to guess who it was from.

And *God* , was it pretty.

“ID on our victim places him as Frederick Treeves, missing person’s profile traces him to North Carolina; back in July.” Beverley’s voice was loud, demanding as she looked over the papers in hand. When she’d gotten them, he hadn't noticed.

Words betrayed him, tumbling clumsily from his lips as Will tore his gaze from the body. “Not very long ago. Who, uh,” He didn't miss the way Hannibal stared. “Who reported him?”

Katz blinked, eyes narrowing as she glared at the files. The print was tiny, he couldn't blame her. “A late-night jogger. Decomp placed this death a little over a week ago, but God knows why nothing was said.”

“Tattlecrime should've been all over this,” Thank God for the early hour, less the press be all over the body; and yet the thought of Freddie Lounds getting her grubby little hands on something as rich as *this* sent a wave of irritation through his skin. “Could the body have been moved?”

“It's probable, though we’ll have to check more thoroughly. We’ll bring the body back once you’re done here,” A sigh, the warmth of the atmosphere pressing at his neck. His nose wrinkled, air thick with the rot and disease of death. It smelled rancid. (He loved it.)

With that, Beverley stalked off; content to leave him alone.

He wasn't, though.

Doctor Lecter stood at his side, hands placid at his flank and less interested than he had been the week prior. He seemed more curious in the way Will stared at the corpse, gaze lingering

just a little too long to be anything but knowing.

“Another Ripper victim?” They both knew Hannibal had only asked in courtesy, the answer as obvious as the organs missing from the victim’s stomach.

“Killed in sounders of three.” The term was so *bland,* though when said in reminiscence of The Ripper it reminded him vaguely of the opera. (Hannibal enjoyed opera, didn't he?)

Their conversation quieted with the buzz of flies around them, a nervousness prickling at the back of his neck as Will shifted his weight. The scene was biblical, not at all unlike the death he’d given a woman the week prior.

Had The Ripper done this to respond?

“This.. Kill,” His voice was slow, words sluggish as he struggled to acclimate. “It's religious.” Said aloud, the words felt very obvious; though point blank he wasn't sure if anyone could tell. “The, uhm, honey; for one.” Idiot.

Lecter seemed to pause, gaze turning once more to Will if only to question *why.* Sweat beaded at his skin, and Will found it harder to meet the doctor’s eyes. He coughed, suddenly vaguely embarrassed. “He was gutted.” Hannibal only blinked, and he felt minutely nervous.

“His crime was *sin,* and this,” His hands gestured vaguely upward, unable to properly gather the words to explain. “ *This* was to cure him. Free him of the impurity nested in his skin and find solace in the temptation.”

“But,” His throat felt sore, face suddenly all too hot. He felt like a child, desperate to show someone he respected a dream without quite remembering it.

“ *But?* ” Hannibal pressed, hands clasping behind his back as if to spur more. Interest shone in auburn eyes, and Will wasn't quite sure as to *why.*

Slowly, as if to coax a animal, he let the words slip from his lips. “It was also a response. An offering of an olive branch to the man who killed that woman.”

“A *love letter* .”

Lecter’s breath hitched, so *slight* in the way he wasn't sure if he hadn't imagined it. “A declaration?” The doctor’s voice was quiet, eyes so warm yet unreadable in the way that itched at the back of his throat as he clarified.

“An invitation.”

Their gaze locked, expression on Hannibal’s face unreadable and yet so *calculated* that it reminded him vaguely of a predator deciding if it was hungry enough for another meal.

He wondered if that was how he looked when killing.

Both were quiet as they stared, though it was Hannibal who was the first to break if only to speak. “Could I interest you in dinner?”

A laugh escaped his lips, dry and almost humourless as tension eased from his muscles. “Trying to woo me, Doctor?” The question was only half-rhetorical, a spreading sense of something he couldn't place pooling at the back of his throat. He tried not to tease that it wasn't even close to lunch.

“Quite.” The response was met with another laugh, and Will let an exhale slip his lips. He was tired, exhaustion and hunger gnawing at his insides and *fuck* if he was going to pass up a free meal.

Internal debate decided, he dipped his head in a slow nod.

“Lead the way.”

Hannibal Lecter’s dining room was anything but cheap.

Decor lined his walls, a mix between something Will could've considered snobby in anyone else’s home and decidedly *exotic* . The carpet beneath his feet was soft, thick and warm between his toes and he found himself debating on whether his psychiatrist’s floor really deserved to be softer than his bed.

The room was warm, not entirely unpleasant in practice but still just as irritating as he shifted in his seat. Sweat beaded on the back of his neck, thick in mediation and Will resisted the urge to groan in premeditated distress.

It was his fault, actually. Hannibal had offered to take his coat, and he’d almost let him if not for the fact that it hid most of his knives. Will Graham was not a smart man, even at the best of times, but he wasn't sure how far he could push without being *seen.*

He shifted uncomfortably, a grimace flickering across his lips as he turned to glare at the doorway to the side. The doors were large, metal things; painted a browning gray that he supposed suited Hannibal far too well to undo. If he was correct in the shuffling sound from behind it, they led to the kitchen.

Minutely, he wondered if they were soundproofed.

His question went unanswered as his host pushed through the door, delicate, metal trays held in hand that looked more expensive than his house.

A variety of greens sat atop the plates, accompanied only by what Will could describe poorly as a slurry of meats and sauce. It looked rather appetising, paired beautifully and presented

just as despite the immediate distaste.

Actually, the dish was probably plated how it was done traditionally, but he was no connoisseur.

“Who are we eating?” A prod. Pressure to an unhealed, festering wound that had gone untouched. Hannibal gave him a look he couldn't decide was displeasure.

“Le frésinat,” There was a moment where Will wasn't sure that his joke was quite that; tension unyielding in an atmosphere soured. He’d pressed, a word to gauge if the doctor would catch it. He did.

His expression was vaguely confused, less so in how a rabbit is but more as though a predator was unsure of if its prey *knew.* Calculating midsnarl, the snap of canine jaws against beating flesh on which artery would hurt the *most.*

Hannibal Lecter did not let his gaze waver as he set a plate in front of him. “A French dish, regarding of duck fat, fried potatoes, parsley and pig.” Disgust flickered in his host’s eyes as the man turned to seat himself. Not pork, *pig,* as if it had wronged him.

“Smells delicious.” Had Will been wrong about the Doctor? Something itched at the back of his skull, pressure unrelenting as if he’d forgotten something. Not forgot. Forgone.

The scent of spices and something sweet drifted upward as he deliberated on which silverware to use, waiting for his host to sit.

There was the gentle drag of chair legs on wood, muffled and unscathed by the thickened carpet that draped across the floor. He wondered if Hannibal knew there was a game they were both playing, and neither could quite decide the rules.

“Quite.” The reply was short, as were all of Lecter’s replies, though he couldn't help the short pang at the sharpness. The conversation dulled, and the gentle scrape of silverware against ceramic spoke for them. Bits of parsley and potato outlined the main bit of the dish, meat front and centre as he picked at a piece with his fork.

It came easily, the cut thick with fat and as he pressed it to his lips Will blinked. Flavours exploded across his tongue, a hum of pleasure escaping him without permission.

Spices rich in regards cut through the unexpected tang of honey he hadn't quite noticed, warm and light though virtually overwhelming. Across the table, Hannibal seemed almost interested; auburn eyes flickering upward to watch.

He almost didn't catch what the meat was made of.

There is a certain way human flesh is comprised. When cooked a certain way, which is almost any, it falls off the bone in thin snippets. Many may say that it tastes like pork, and while that may be true for some cuts, the best, such as the liver; do not.

Human skin has the quality of chicken when fried, the fat compromising of the thigh more of a beef-like texture when roasted, and the eyes akin to olives when raw.

Perhaps, it is pork that tastes like humanity.

And Will Graham cannot ignore the undeniable way this meal tastes.

Citrusy, with a tang of honey that reminded him so vaguely of the jawbone hanging from the corpse they’d seen earlier that day. Spiced, sure, but *oh,* he could *never* forget the way a human liver broke just as easily as the skin.

He was eating human, most likely Frederick Treeves, which wasn't a bad thing; though the fact he was eating it in Hannibal Lecter's dining room soured his mood.

What kind of game was he playing? "What sort of game did you say this was?" His host was quiet for a moment, auburn eyes darker in the shadow of his home. "Pig," Was the reply, and the word slipped his tongue before he could stop.

"Long?"

Something decidedly predatory found its way into Doctor Lecter's irises, room far too quiet for comfort as the man dipped his head in what Will assumed was the slowest of undecided nods. Couldn't know. Didn't know.

What was this dance they had weaved, threads of gold entangling their limbs and so dangerous. A misstep, and one would die.

Another moment of silence was broken when he blinked, staring contest shattered in what he hoped was mutual. "It's good. Your butcher is," The fork in hand gestures vaguely, gaze flickering away to reflect. Hannibal said nothing. "Experienced."

"I would only hope." The doctor's reply was unreadable, posture slightly different as he bore holes into Will's head. Catching his gaze, he plucked yet another piece of *Treeves* from his plate, pressing it to his lips ever so slow. Hannibal watched, unblinking as Will chewed, swallowed, nodded.

Ever so slow, the doctor dipped his head.

Recognition.

He’d passed.

Chapter End Notes

Just to preface Will knows Hannibal is a killer but right now he hasn't quite put together the puzzle pieces that he’s the ripper. He heard the word ethical butcher and ran that. Hannibal also doesn't know Will is a killer, but he’s thinking on it. Mans wondering.…

AnglerFish

Chapter Summary

Will hallucinates his way into a murder scene after worrying Hannibal doesn't like him.

Hannibal shows up at Will’s house too early to have just been in Baltimore.

Chapter Notes

I don't know if it's obvious but I hate the term person suit so Will gets “horribly stitched masks”.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The streets were slick with ichor when Will Graham found him.

There is a certain smell to death. It is *rot* , a festering of the skin that has only just begun to slip from the bone. Low, buzzing drone of flies in your peripheral and a flicker of wings fattened by disease.

It is disgusting, and that was how he knew.

Gravel and dirt crunch like bone beneath his work boots, concrete made rubble with use and evaded time. It was quiet, aside from that; the buzzing drone of cicadades left miles behind from a comfort he couldn't quite slip.

August was always a wet month, with inches of rain flooding into the roads and sinking into the skin of the earth; muddying every pathway and avenue as if each had offended the sky. Perhaps they had, an uptick in water bringing the brief remembrance of Humanity’s *Great Flood* .

It had rained the night before, unsurprisingly; street slick with water and spilt oil that shimmered like a distorted skyline in his peripheral. His feet scuffed at the ground, unease settling thick in his bones like a poison he couldn't quite see.

It had been hours since he'd last seen anyone.

Not in terms of sight, albeit. No, Will had glared at the occasional passersby of the hour; sea-glass blue eyes so dim in the light that they did little more than reminisce of the thing he was running from.

And he was.

The feeling of denim itched at his skin, thickened fabric tight around his ankles like the apparition of cuffs begging to tie him further down. He'd worn overalls, straps buckling around his waist as if Will would wade into the bayou that loomed in the memories of childhood.

Ichor clung to his skin, wet and phantom in memory but just as slick as reality. Jack had called him, early hours of dawn cut with orders barked through the grimy speaker of his phone and the promise of another body.

(*A huff of air on the back of his neck, thickened with the blood coating its neck.)*

Disappointment bloomed in cold strands when The Pendulum of his internal clock twisted, grotesque corpse animating itself in fits of *please, please* that ripped at the skin of his teeth. " *It's not him."* He'd whispered, out of breath and shaking with phantom pleas that strung across his hands. " *Not The Ripper."*

(The Stag had been disappointed too, head swaying from side to side in low, sweeping racks across the gravel.)

For some reason or another, he'd found himself discontent; irritable as the scene had been

deconstructed down to the molecule. Zeller had seemed mildly happy(about as much as anyone working in forensics could ever be), a fingerprint pressed to the skull of their body enough to make Jack send them all home early.

Hannibal hadn't been there when he'd left. *Hadn't needed to be* , Will had reasoned, *it was a cut-and-close case* . (That didn't stop him from sulking in the parking lot anyway.)

He'd sat in his car for a little over an hour, arms resting against the wheel and chin pressed down before he'd grown bored; muscles stiffened and sore in the warm air. The drive home was long, and the thought of having nothing to do but sleep when he opened the door made him blink in disinterest. A walk sounded better.

A quick one, maybe, just enough to leave the discomfort of the scene nipping at his heels. Leave on autopilot, enjoy the vague scenery and relax into the last bit of the warm rain.

It was dark by the time Will had come to.

He'd walked blocks farther than he'd meant, feet chaffed with exert and it was only when he'd stumbled over an empty can in the middle of the road that Will had truly come awake. It was cooler, now; the night sky looming and rain dispersed into pools of water that seemed just as deep.

(*The Stag had followed, trailing behind him in slow, pointed steps like a lost dog. He knew it. Could see it in his peripheral, and yet when he turned he wouldn't find it there.*)

Nothing about the area looked familiar, streetlights almost impending yet their lights could not seem to cover the whole of it. *Google Maps* assured him his car was only half a mile away, and while it was a comfort, he couldn't help but feel lost even bathed in the orange glow of the street.

In all honesty, he probably would've passed the bureau; sleep and that familiar ache of lost time almost reassuring. The thought of slipping away and letting himself move on auto was appetising, clinging to the bed of his nails like a poison.

He almost didn't notice the smell.

The scent of death and rot came like a punch to the gut, eyes widening as the familiar buzzing of flies about a feast met his ears. The street was empty, a three-way intersection made of houses with dimly lit insides and dirtier exteriors unexciting. Anxiety pressed at his skull, body lurching forward with the urge to vomit as he stumbled toward the smell and *he never let his kills get this bad* .

It might've been a fox. *A dog, maybe* , he reasoned; hit when crossing the road and left to fester like the disease it was. It didn't really explain why no one had cleaned it up, though he didn't care to know. The edge of the building separating the road running horizontal to him loomed, covering the part of the street he just *knew* held the thing that writhed with maggots and the like.

(*Somewhere behind him, the silhouette of a stag dipped its head, ambling forward at the slowest of lopes. Bloodied feathers trailed after, fur a browning-maroon that reminded him vaguely of the dirt that was slicked with rain. It was beautiful, really. Showing itself, finally, head twisting to and fro in annoyance as blackened, elongated antlers racked across the air.)*

(Its neck was long, snout darkened and eyes black in the dimming light. Even in the warmth, condensation rose upward from its nose, and it turned; an aggravated snort all that it gave as it stepped out of view. Towards the body. Toward the smell of decay and forgone bones left rotten.)

(*Follow me.*)

He followed.

There was a man in an alleyway to his right as Will turned; lights above the stranger burnt out or off. He was hard to describe, form hazy and almost contorted as he reached up in the dark of the alley he shielded under and tugged at something. A shape rose beside him and Will stood; a sense of growing unease fading into that null ache that cooled his body like a morgue corpse.

It looked familiar.

Another body, he realised disinterestedly, lifted slowly upward into the dark of a fire escape. A rope he could barely see glimmered dully in the light of the apartments below, corpse swaying so gently in tune with the wind that it was as if they were drunk.

What could've been fishing line wrapped around their throat like twine, spine elongated from the weight and their neck almost definitely broken. At this point, it really didn't matter all too much. The person was dead, anyway. Looked it. Smelled like it. He couldn't bother to complain if this stranger wanted to hang his prize.

(The stag was gone. Hazy hoofprints dragged bloodied steps toward the alley, a gentle snort so faint Will wasn't quite sure if he'd heard it echoing dully from within. A fly tracked across his vision, fat and elongated with a meal. He couldn't know if that was real, either.)

Will blinked, cold haze diminishing into a dull throb that beat against his skull. (*He should care, really. Care about the murder. About the death happening in front of him. He didn't.*) The man had finished his work in the time he'd gone to track the stag's progress, standing in the entry of the alleyway with his hands in his coat.

He dug, rummaging in his jacket a second too before fishing out a lighter and a pack of reds. Will could tell, even in the dim light that his flame gave, that the man was inexperienced. His stance was sluggish, prideful and relaxed.

Strong, sure; muscles outlining clothes bloodied with rot that had festered and a chip on his shoulder from what he thought was an achievement.

A goal. Something to relish, prey playing predator when celebrating something he *didn't deserve* .

It made him sick.

There was a moment where the stranger's face lit up in the dark, illuminated by the faintest glimmer of a cigarette to flame and cheekbones aglow with warmth.

He stood, hand held to cup his light and eyes lazily tracing over his surroundings all too late. The man's gaze rolled almost fluidly across the street, shoulders slanted with ease and tranquillity.

Will shifted, inhale sharp as though he'd forgotten to breathe with anticipation. *(He had, body so rigid that his joints bemoaned motion in protest. The stag was gone, replaced only with something faceless and tall. It kneeled, charred and blackened with time as a hand cupped the man before it.)*

(He couldn't see it. Will knew it, knew that these things were hallucinations coming from a broken mind and a tendency to wander; and yet he couldn't help but weep for what he couldn't do.)

The stranger froze, flame licking at his ungloved fingers for a moment too long before he stumbled, dropping both his lighter and cigarette to the ground.

Whether it was slick with blood or rain, he couldn't tell.

(*Burn.*)

There was a sharp yelp of pain from the man as he gripped his hand to his chest, gaze flickering from Will and his peripheral in indecision.

“You scared me.” The excuse was shit, the stranger shifting uneasily forward and pointedly away from the body he’d just hung. “Nice, uhm,” He swallowed. “Night?” Pathetic excuse.

(*The words dripped from his lips, begging to be uttered into the night. It would be so easy.)*

“Can I have a cigarette?”

“Wh-what?”

There was a pause, body beneath the fire escape it had been tied to swaying as the wind picked up. Its feet grazed the top of the man’s head, and he flinched; shuffling further from them both. “Uhm, no, s-sorry man. Just, passing by..”

He turned, an eye over his shoulder flickering back where he came, the alleyway dark and almost guttural. Will Graham stood, unmoving yet swaying ever so slightly as the heat on the back of his neck sweltered. When the man passed the corner, nervous stance out of view he sighed; bringing a hand to his brow to beg a chill from his skin.

It was getting worse.

But, the stranger had left. Will had let him go.

(*The question of **why** blossomed in his mind, painful sickness tight in his throat.*)

Because he was *curious* .

-

Hannibal did not show up to the next crime scene. Alana was there in his absence, fingers pressed tight to the skin of her forearm as Jack Crawford talked her ear off. She looked mildly out of her depth, though he could not help but care less.

The words *amateur* and *fingerprints* greeted his ears as Will made his way around the police tape and disgruntled reporters, a frown pressed to his lips. The man had not been an expert, though he'd hoped for a bit of a chase before the eventual trap.

(Where had that come from?)

"Will, so nice to see you." The words were wrong on Alana's lips, the skin of his forearms slick with sweat and phantom gore. Her fingers pushed forward, extended in the step of a handshake. "Doctor Bloom," A smile wormed its way upward, disappointingly fake as he blatantly ignored her outstretched hand. "I didn't know you were *cleared* for crime scenes."

"She is now." Jack countered, and both glanced up as if Crawford shouldn't of been there. Will felt his face (*mask*) contort, brow raising to shoot his boss a glare that asked so blatantly *why.* Jack continued. "Hannibal had something come up. She's our stand-in for now. Speaking of,"

Disappointment blossomed across his vision, throat filling with something akin to grief that he couldn't quite place. He couldn't empathise with himself. Couldn't know. (*The stag huffed beside him, muzzle nudging the crook of his neck. It was wet, coated slick with phantom blood, the blood that he'd drowned in days earlier.*)

Had it something to do with the week prior? Was Hannibal avoiding him, uncomfortable with their previous dinner(*and probably acutely aware that Will was a serial killer*)?

Did he only see something that wasn't there?- drown a slowly forming friendship that had died overnight. Anxiety prickled at his throat, quelled only as his fingers gripped inward. He couldn't think about it now. Not here.

(Not anywhere.)

"Bloating says the body was dropped off around four days after the death," A file brushed Will's hands and he took it almost mindlessly, woozy from the scent of death and relenting panic in his chest. Last night had been a dream, dayless and slipping from his memories like water through the cracks in his hands. "Strung with *fishing wire* from a second-floor fire escape."

Jack paused, trailing off as he glanced away from the corpse beside him, smell just as overwhelming as it had been for Will. "Beverley suggested that it was last minute, with the Ripper and the *Wendigo's* death toll climbing *higher* as of late." At that, his attention caught on Crawford's words, blue-green eyes glancing over at the mention of *his name* .

“Wanted the media’s coverage, outshine em and all that.” Zeller piped up, quickly shushed by a pointed glare from Alana and Jack. Will didn’t comment.

The name had been Freddie Lound’s idea, cropping up like weeds in the cracks of Will’s life after she’d snuck into a crime scene he’d decorated with someone’s skull. *It was fitting,* Hannibal had remarked, sneaking a glance to Will as they walked. *A legend comes from something people fear. Something recognisably real.*

Why the hell was he thinking about Hannibal Lecter.

“You found fingerprints,” Crawford’s gaze met his, an uninterested expression slipping through the crudely sewn patches of the mask he wore. “What do you need from me?” The question was met without silence, Jack’s brow furrowing angrily. “Your *imagination* .” His hands waved vaguely in the direction of the corpse, irritation obvious in the way he hissed the word. “Get to work, Will.”

A sigh, yellow crackling at the edges of his peripheral as he shuffled forward and away from the glaring gaze of Jack Crawford and Alana Bloom. Crawford never called him anything but Will. First name, almost personal. Not quite. Fake, a scalpel trying to slip beneath the many layers of skin he could carry.

(Only one had.)

The body was the same, corpse bloated with four days time and pierced through the throat. It was rot, and he blinked. Another suit. Another mask to stitch to his own, fabric just enough to cover the face he’d never seen.

He took a breath.

And the pendulum swung

His phone rang on the way home, sweat beading on his temple and obscuring his view of the dimly lit road. The ringtone was unfamiliar, the predetermined jingle irritating as Will grabbed his phone from the console.

The caller ID was jarring, beautiful, simple little letters making his breath hitch and eyes veer from the road. There were only two people who called him, and when one of them wasn’t a phishing rig the other was Jack Crawford.

He slid the call open, line crackling to life with static ambience. It was silent for a moment, the street so quiet as he lifted the phone to his ear. There, cradled between his clavicle and ear, Will could’ve waited forever.

“Will?” A benign, prodding voice; monotonically neutral and quizzical in its own right. Like cold whiskey burning his throat, liquid soft and beautiful.

The car veered to the left, hands shaking as he gripped the wheel and slowed down. *“Hannibal,”* He breathed, soft under the sound of gravel beneath his car. Hannibal Lecter was quiet for a moment, seemingly listening for more and yet it never came. A sense of nervous energy flickered through his body, fear dancing across his spine. God, he hoped Doctor Lecter hadn’t heard that.

Almost as if he hadn’t, Hannibal continued, words slow like you would to a dog. Will was minutely reminded of the week before when he’d pulled Winston from the same road. “Would you happen to be interested in dinner?”

The road seemed longer, yellow lines striping down the middle covered with grit and weeds. He swallowed. “I’d accept, but Baltimore is an hour away and I’m almost h-” “Would your house be preferable?” Hannibal’s voice cut through, a nervous energy pressing at his skull. His home?

Will nodded, pausing for a moment at the silence of the line before murmuring an embarrassed “ *Yes*.- Uhm, yes. Sure. I’ll see you tonight?” as his gaze flickered across the blackened asphalt. “I will meet you there.” A smirk pulled at the sound of Hannibal’s voice, and the call ended with a click as he hung up almost abruptly.

Sweat beaded on the back of Will’s neck as he pulled the phone from his shoulder, tossing it back into the passengers seat and scanning the treeline for a second more. His home, and Hannibal was going to meet him there.

Hannibal, a cannibal who quite possibly hired a butcher to bring him the best sorts of meat, who swam in only the fanciest of meals and quite possibly knew more French than the Cajun branch Will knew; was coming over. To the dog-hair-covered, iron-smelling hole of a home.

Will Graham pressed his foot further into the pedal, and begged god that a cop wouldn’t pull him over.

Hannibal arrived less than ten minutes after he pulled into the drive, black Bentley rolling smoothly onto the edge of the grass as if to park for a stay. Will had only been able to pull blankets out from his closet, sheets haphazardly dumped on the mattress of his bed and half-fitted to minute perfection.

The dogs crowded around the door, whining as he shoved their beds toward the kitchen. “*Descendre,”* He hissed, brow furrowing with agitation at their pawing. Will stood, ignoring the excited yelping of his dogs as a silhouette pressed close to the screen door. “Get down.”

A knock, casual yet almost demanding and he couldn't help the feeling of urgency within it as he pulled it open. (God, he was early. He couldn't of just been driving through.)

There, bathed in the yellowing light of the porch lamp, stood Doctor Hannibal Lecter. His hands were clasped behind his back, a cloth bag clutched between his fingers and decidedly heavy. He glanced forward, gaze dragging away from the darkened treeline and to Will in an almost disinterested movement.

"Will. I have dinner." That much was obvious, dark maroon eyes shimmering as Will did his best to block the dogs from shedding too much on the doctor's obviously tailored suit. He wasn't sure that it wasn't more expensive than his house. "May I come in?"

He paused, mask pulling together in half-worked stitches and disgustingly rotted cloth. It was only when Hannibal dipped his head in question that he realised he'd waited too long, and shuffled backward almost awkwardly. "Yes. Uhm, yes. Come in. Sorry for the mess."

Doctor Lecter only nodded, humming a slightly indifferent affirmation that only served to make Will more nervous. As he turned, door closing behind him and dogs scampering after the newer arrival, he froze.

(*The stag was back, antlers pushing against the ceiling and stitches that spanned its fur coming undone like twine that trailed along the floor after it. It strode forward, patches of skin peeling with every torn suture.*)

(*It wasn't the stag that made him pause as Hannibal set his food on the table, plastic Tupperware set almost gently beside a looming blackened figure stood beside him. It was tall, hovering almost angrily over Lecter as he set far-too-fancy silverware.*)

(*Antlers just as long as his stag's brushed the ceiling, lamp over the table swinging to and fro. Its face was familiar, pleather-skinned body almost gaunt. It turned, whitened eyes glaring as it loomed from the stag before it and to Will.*)

(*He didn't want to see.*)

"-A simple protein scramble. Eggs, sausage, and mushrooms." Hannibal had been talking, voice cut off by the whine in Will's ears. He blinked, Stag and Figure vanishing just as quickly as they'd come. He turned, pulling a spare chair towards him as the other sat. "Breakfast for dinner, doctor?"

Hannibal glanced up as Will snagged a fork, brow raised almost diffidently. Like it was a stupid question, and he should've known that food was important any time. "Of course. Sit down, Will."

There was a moment where they both sat in silence, uninterested in talking as Graham shoveled bits of egg and sausage into his maw. Disappointment blossomed in the back of his

throat as the taste of actual pork met his tongue.

If Hannibal noticed, he didn’t comment.

“You weren’t at the scene today.”

A prob, nail digging beneath the skin of a festering cut. *Why?*

“I was preparing for a dinner party,” The words slipped from his lips like honeyed wine, an apology unsaid and yet Will couldn’t help the pang of *preparing what?* “I would apologise; the tragedy it is that I could not make it, though we both know my stance.”

Hannibal’s gaze flickered upward, warm maroon irises shifting minutely. They stayed that way, sea-blue eyes meeting brown ones with unnerving regularity. The sound of silverware scraping broke the eye contact, and Will glanced back down at his plate. “This doesn’t feel like a dinner party, doctor.”

(*The thing stood, boney hands engulfing Lecter’s shoulders and face ever so familiar. No.*)

The doctor hummed, a quiet, lulling sound that pulled from the back of his throat. “No, it isn't.” Started matter-of-factly, as if that was all there was to the conversation. The answer came moments after, an obvious debate held in the air before Hannibal continued as he glanced up. This time, the eye contact held. “Tomorrow, at eight o’clock. I would love to have you for dinner, Will.”

(*He wasn't sure that was a joke. Wasn't sure Hannibal had a butcher at all.*)

A laugh blossomed in his throat, sickening knowledge that he wasn't so sure he wanted to know pressing at the edge of his skull. “I don’t have that many fancy coats, doctor.” Hannibal Lecter’s brow raised, almost as if to say *I do not believe that.* “Wouldn’t want to ruin your party.”

“Nonsense. I wouldn't want anyone else there,” The response was quick, and Will’s gaze finally flickered away. Too much pressure from the leering gaze, too much as the pieces of this filthy puzzle came together.

(*Looming, whitened eyes and a face that looked far too similar to his companion’s.* ***Are you like me?*** *-The stag’s antlers brushed the figure, entanglement like poetry and a question unsaid that they both knew.*)

A sigh. And he nodded, so slow as he gently set his fork down.

“Alright. I’ll bring my best.”

“Wouldn’t have you any other way.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the late update guys my mom tried to kill me and Ive had to deal with the counseling and such 😓 I promise the next one will be soon

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!